# “Three Great Comforts Of Christ”

## *Isaiah 9:2, 6; 1st Corinthians 15:3-4; Hebrews 9:27-28*

***We human beings like to separate and divide things. We like to label them and categorize them. We like to figure out what’s greater or better or higher than something else. We do it all the time with people. We imagine this one’s more worthy than another, or that one has fewer problems than we do. That one’s got it made because they have great wealth; another comes from a troubled background and will probably never amount to anything. That’s what we do.***

***But there are some things about being human that can’t be separated or divided, labeled or categorized. Some things make us all equal whether we worship Jesus or no god at all, whether we’re rich or poor, whether we live in a penthouse in a city or a hovel in a bombed out town. They’re things that every human being has had or will ever have, regardless of whether we’re six minutes old or 96 years old: we all need to breathe. We all need to eat. We all need to sleep. Our blood is the same color. And we all need comfort from time to time.***

As we prepare to come to the Table of our Lord, let us consider three great comforts that come from Jesus Christ—comforts that all of us need, just as much as we need oxygen or food or water. Turn with me to the first of our Scripture readings, Isaiah 9:2, 6.

We know these verses well. We hear them during Advent every year. But they came at a troubled time in Israel’s history. Jerusalem had been under siege by the Assyrians. Israel’s king had been near death. Everywhere the people looked there were problems, disappointments and fears. And God said to them,

*2The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.*

*6For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

 **The first great comfort that comes from Jesus is his birth.** The incarnation of God in the flesh meets our humanness. We’re not just a random assembly of molecules. We’re not an accident of evolution. We’re not an experiment in social engineering or the results of Darwin’s adage that ‘only the strong survive.’

We’re created in the image of the one true God. Our humanness is so important that God submitted himself to its trials and limitations. Jesus met us through his humble birth in Bethlehem’s stable. He became the Son of Man so that we could become sons and daughters of God.

***God could’ve used any number of ways to reach us with his love and salvation. He’s God, after all. He can come up with anything he likes! Yet out of all the options and possibilities in the cosmos, God said “the best way is to wear their flesh and walk among them.”*** That’s an acknowledgement of how important our creation and our lives truly are.

Through the birth of Jesus, we recognize the humanness that we all share, and that God was willing to share. With so many things in our world trying to divide us or pit us against one another—partisan politics, race, ideology, religion—there is no escaping the basic fundamental truth: we are all human. We all need comfort. We all need to feel loved and appreciated. We find comfort in our struggles and doubts when we consider a God who was willing to limit himself in time and space. Comfort comes to us because of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, which reminds us that we are indeed valuable, precious and irreplaceable.

***You may’ve noticed that on Christmas Eve I always have the bread and cup placed in the manger. This is a visual reminder of the incarnation. The body and blood that we receive is Christ coming into our world. The divine becomes human. The infinite becomes finite.*** When we come to this Table, part of our remembrance is recognizing that it is the incarnation that meets us in our humanness, and blesses its importance and worth.

 Now let’s turn to 1st Corinthians 15:3-4. ***The Communion elements in the manger on Christmas Eve not only highlight our humanness; they recognize where the humanness of Jesus Christ will lead him. A manger of wood ultimately ends at a cross of wood.*** The body and blood that takes on human form will become that which is broken and shed to redeem our fallen human condition and restore us to God.

*3I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. 4He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.* **The great comfort of Christ’s death and resurrection meets our need for a Savior.**

As human beings, we don’t have the capacity to save ourselves. Under our own power, we can never be good enough to reach God. We can’t do enough good deeds to erase the backlog of sins that dog us. As Christians, we believe that humanity is fundamentally broken due to sin, and the only way to rectify that is through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through his atoning work on the cross, he removes our sins and covers us with his own righteousness. He makes it possible for us to be placed in a better relationship with God.

Before Christ, we were under the influence of sin. We were slaves to it. Paul wrote in Romans 6:19, *Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin…* As slaves, we had no choice but to do what our sinful nature commanded.

But by accepting the atoning work of Christ, we move from being slaves to being sons and daughters of God. Paul also wrote in Romans 6:6, *We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.* Instead, we become part of God’s family. Galatians 4:7 repeats this: *Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child.*

The death and resurrection of Jesus are central tenants of our faith. They cannot be exchanged, diminished or done away with. Without the cross, we have no comfort that our sins are forgiven; without the empty tomb we have no comfort of the triumph of life over death. When we come to this Table, part of our remembrance is recognizing that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus that is the foundation of our faith, the ground of our hope, and the anticipation of greater things yet to come.

 Now let’s turn briefly to Hebrews 9:27-28. **The third comfort that we receive from Christ is the promise of his return.** As human beings, we look forward. We dream. We plan. We envision. It’s in our nature. Jesus gives us the greatest reason to look ahead: he has promised to return. He will come in glory to take his children home, and set right all that is wrong.

*27And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, 28so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.* The Second Coming, as this is often called, is the Christian doctrine that tells us that wickedness and evil will not have the last word. Good will triumph, just as it did on Easter morning. Every injustice will be corrected. All that has been broken, twisted, ruined, destroyed will be fixed.

Christ’s return is our comfort when we lose our loved ones in death. We shall see them again. Christ’s return is our comfort when our bodies are wearing out. We shall receive new bodies like that of our resurrected Lord. Christ’s return is our comfort when life seems unfair, when tensions between people and countries escalate, when the poor suffer, when it seems that sin and evil go unpunished. In his second visit to this earth, Jesus will come to gather his bride—the church—and reward her faithfulness.

When we come to this Table, part of our remembrance is looking forward to that glorious day. By eating and drinking in this symbolic meal, we’re not only re-enacting the death of Jesus; we’re anticipating the great banquet in heaven, the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The comforts we receive from Christ—his birth meeting us in our humanness, his death and resurrection meeting our need for a Savior, and his return meeting our anticipation for all things to be made new—these comforts are represented in the bread and cup. When you come forward, remember the comforts you receive from our Lord, and how each is represented at this Table. Amen.